

Denver, Colorado March 6-9, 2008

### LCC 2008 Quick Updates

- Elaine Viets WILL be in attendance!
- Registration now at 106, including 37 authors!

Registration: \$165 Full, \$115 Light, \$55 Associate  
[www.leftcoastcrime.org/2008](http://www.leftcoastcrime.org/2008)

Hotel: Adam's Mark Denver  
 \$139 single/double \$149 +  
[www.adamsmark.com/denver](http://www.adamsmark.com/denver)



## The View from a Mile High

Welcome to the first edition of the Left Coast Crime – Murder on the Rocks Newsletter! Every month we'll bring you the latest news on LCC Denver, along with interviews of attending authors and fans, overviews of Denver amenities and attractions, and whatever else we feel you need to know about LCC 2008.

This month, check out co-chair Suzanne Proulx's article on Alferd Packer... Who is Alferd and why is our LCC banquet named after

him? Suzanne has all the delicious answers below.

Next, read a Q&A with our Guest of Honor Stephen White. How much of character Alan Gregory is really Stephen himself and why does he like Boulder, Colorado as his prime setting? See his answers on page three.

Want to know more about Denver? A combination of colorful old west and contemporary new west, you'll discover some surprises about the city in

our Top Ten list. And native D.A. Davenport gives us the local scoop in our Things to do in Denver when your DEAD feature. Each month, she'll bring you features on hotels, restaurants, and places of local interest so you can plan well in advance of your trip to the Mile High City. Check out her advice this month on page four.

So there it is - your first insight into LCC 2008! We hope you're as excited as we are, because we think you're in for a rockin' good time!  
 Lori Lacefield

### Individual Highlights

View from a Mile High	1
Alferd Packer Banquet	1
Q&A with LCC GOH Stephen White	3
Denver Top Ten	4
Things to do in Denver when your DEAD	4
Conference Contacts	4



## Alferd Packer - the original Hannibal the Cannibal

Who is Alfred Packer and why is this year's LCC Banquet named after him? Suzanne Proulx introduces us to Colorado's Folk Villain.

You have your folk heroes—actual people whose deeds have become legend, like Daniel Boone and Johnny Appleseed. And then you have your folk villains—and in this category, Colorado has the dubious honor of claiming Alferd (or Alfred) Packer, one of the only citizens of the US ever convicted of cannibalism.

The facts: In the fall of 1873, a party of men left Salt Lake City heading for the gold fields in the mountains of Colorado. They started out in high spirits, thinking of the riches to come. But they encountered barren wastes and snowy mountains, and were about to turn back in despair when they came upon an Indian camp. The Indians took them to the chief, and they were fed and sheltered until they had recovered from their adventure thus far.

Advised by Chief Ouray that the winter would be even worse than what they'd previously encountered and they should turn back, ten of the party members took that very excellent advice. The other ten decided to forge on with their original plan. Chief Ouray gave them provisions and suggested they follow the Gunnison River, which would take them to the Los Pinos Agency. Four of them did, but Packer talked the other six into striking off, heading for the (cont. p2)

## Alferd Packer, cont.

Headwaters of the Rio Grande, where rich mines were said to have been discovered.

In February of 1874, two of the four men who had followed the Gunnison arrived, on the verge of starvation, at the Los Pinos Agency, the other two having perished of exposure and starvation. The group led by Packer was assumed to have been lost.

Then, in March of 1874, Packer also appeared at

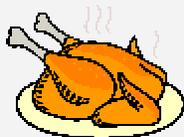
the Agency, described as "wild-looking" and bloated of face but otherwise in good condition. He said his five companions had deserted him when he became ill. However, he was well supplied with money, and bought many rounds of drink, during which his story slipped a bit, to the point where those listening to him began to suspect that he had, in fact, killed his companions and taken their cash.

Even worse, the investigation clearly

pointed to Packer having murdered and eaten his companions, and he later confessed to it. In fact he confessed to several different versions. In one version one of his companions had shot the others while Packer was gathering firewood, and attempted to kill Packer when he returned to camp – so it was self defense.

No one assumed Packer was innocent, particularly when he tried to assault a member of the party he was leading to find the

*The Myth: During the trial, the judge supposedly said: "Damn you, Alferd Packer! There were seven Demmycrats in Hinsdale County and you et five of them!"*



*Tastes like  
chicken!*

bodies of the men. In June, when the snow had thawed somewhat, an artist discovered the remains of Packer's party, which indicated the truth of Packer's confession – at least where he said he'd eaten them. He was charged with five murders, but escaped.

Nine years later, in March of 1883, authorities caught up with him in Laramie County, Wyoming, where he was said to be involved with a gang of outlaws. He was brought back to Colorado, tried, and found

guilty, with the death penalty attached. He immediately appealed and was granted a new trial. This time the verdict was guilty but the sentence was eight years for each offense, for a total of 40 years. He was pardoned in January of 1901, and moved to a ranch in Deer Creek, Colorado (where he was said to have become a vegetarian), and died in 1907.

The Myth: Convicted of cannibalism.  
The Truth: Convicted of murder, reversed on a technicality; reconvicted of manslaughter.

For some reason, Packer caught on as a legend in popular culture. His case was written up in *Celebrated Criminal Cases of North America*, by Thomas S. Duke (1910), and inserted as a direct quote from there into Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man* (1929). Phil Ochs wrote a folk song about him, "The Ballad of Alferd Packer" (1964), with the refrain "They called him a murderer, a cannibal, a thief; It just doesn't pay to eat anything but Government-inspected beef." In 1968 students at the University of Colorado named the grill in the student union the Alferd G.

*The Truth: The actual sentencing statement read: "Close your ears to the blandishments of hope. Listen not to the flattering promises of life, but prepare for the dread certainty of death"*

Packer Memorial Grill, with the motto "Have a friend for lunch!" The cafeteria in the U.S. Department of Agriculture was also briefly named the Alfred Packer Memorial Grill (the plaque proving it resides at the bar of the National Press Club). Packer has also inspired a 1999 movie, *Ravenous*, and *Cannibal: The Musical* by

Trey Parker (of *South Park* fame). His legend has also been the subject, over the years, of various mock trials, continuing investigations, CSI-style tests, and a pardon (in 1981).

In short, he's the kind of folk villain mystery fans can really sink their teeth into.

Suzanne Proulx



## Q&A with LCC Guest of Honor Stephen White

**Q: Your character, Alan Gregory, is a clinical psychologist like yourself. Does the similarity end there? How much of Stephen White is reflected in Alan Gregory?**

A: The similarities don't exactly end there but there's no need to exaggerate them, either. I lived in Boulder on a nd off for fifteen years; Alan still lives there. Although neither of us is a model of mental health, his neuroses are different than mine. And he has advantages that I never had as a psychologist. First, he has the benefit of all my years of experience. And second, I get to think about his lines as long as I'd like. Real patients never have that luxury.

**Q: In what ways does your writing benefit from your training in psychology?**

A: There are two benefits of my previous experience as a psychologist that I consider invaluable to my life as a writer. The first is that my work gave me a chance to observe and study the infinite varieties of motivation that human beings

have for their behavior. The other is that being a psychotherapist exposed me to dialogue in its purest form. For eight to ten hours a day over a period of fifteen years I had the privilege of sitting and listening to a wide variety of people just talk. I can't imagine a better training ground for writing dialogue.



**Q: What makes Boulder a prime location for your novels?**

A: Boulder is as important to me as the fictional village is to Jim Carrey in *The Truman Show*. Boulder is scenic, it's witty, it's intelligent, it's malleable, it's stubborn, it's idealistic, it's naive. It's a town I could never make up, and if I did, I'm not sure anyone would believe me.

**Q: Which of your books is your favorite and why?**

A: The simplest answer to this question is that my favorite book is the one that I am currently writing. The reason is simple: I like to think that I'm getting better at this process and that each book reflects my maturation as a writer. But it is also true to say that each of the earlier

books are dear to me for some specific reason. *Privileged Information* because it was the first, *Higher Authority* because it was such a departure for me at that stage of my career, *Critical Conditions* because of the challenge of writing characters from an adolescent point of view.

**Q: In your novels you've taken on issues of managed health care, the Mormon Church, the cult of celebrity. Is it your intention to make a social or political statement in each novel?**

A: Writing a book is a laborious, lengthy process. I feel strongly that if I, as the writer, don't stay interested in the work, neither will any reader. So I pick topics that fascinate me or trouble me or captivate me, topics that will stay interesting even as I proceed to

examine them from many different directions. Although I don't intend to make political or social statements with my work, the exploration of controversial topics usually involves the precipitation of polarizing conflicts between characters. From polarization inevitably comes point of view. Thrillers are good stories that take readers for a ride. I like to learn something along the way as I'm writing, and I like to offer readers an opportunity to learn something along the way if they are interested in doing so. I like to think each book is about something.

**Q: Alan Gregory's wife Lauren is living with Multiple Sclerosis. What feedback have you received from fans, people with MS, and health care workers, about your portrayal?**

A: I would estimate that about half my mail involves readers' reaction to Lauren having MS. The overwhelming sentiment I hear is one of gratitude, wither for the fact of the portrayal of the illness, the reality of the portrayal of its effect on Lauren's life, or for the nature of the portrayal – that I present her as a vibrant, interesting, sexual being despite her illness. People who have MS and people who work with MS patients have been especially supportive.

**Q: What kind of books do you like to read?**

A: My reading is eclectic. I read a relatively equal mix of fiction and non-fiction and find that research reading takes up more and more of my time. The longer I write crime fiction, however, the less of it I tend to read.

## Top Ten Things You Didn't Know About Denver



Denver brews more beer than any other American City.

There are 200 named mountain peaks visible from Denver.

Denver boasts the Largest Art Museum between the East and West Coasts.

Denver really is exactly a mile high. A single step on the Capitol Building is 5,280 feet above sea level.

Denver averages 300+ days of sunshine per year!

In Denver's rarified air, golf balls, baseballs, and footballs go 10% further. So do cocktails.

Denver has the largest urban bike trail system in the nation - more than 850 miles worth

With less water vapor in the air, the sky really is bluer in Colorado.

The Denver Performing Arts Complex is the second largest in the nation - second only to NY's Lincoln Center.

Geographically, Denver is classified as a high plains desert. Yes. really. So drink lots of water!

## Things to do in Denver when you're DEAD (dehydrated, emaciated, and in need of diversion)



Photos courtesy of Denver Chamber of Commerce

Hello, and welcome to the Rockies! I may be a bit prejudiced since I live here, but this is a great setting for LCC 2008. I toured the public areas of The Adam's Mark Hotel on Saturday and that place is going to knock your socks off. The lobby takes your breath away as you enter. Excellent restaurant and a large, lovely bar. The hotel is located on the south side of the open-air 16<sup>th</sup> street mall that stretches at least 10 to 12 blocks long which is bracketed by Barnes and Noble, 1 block away, and the LODO branch of the world-famous Tattered Cover Bookstore, perfect for this crew of Book-a-holics. Branching off from there down Blake St. and Wazee St., and running the length of the Mall as well, are amazing nightclubs and cigar bars, pubs,

restaurants and eateries, shops, and a movie theater. And to get you there, if you don't want to walk, is a free shuttle bus that travels the entire mall, well into the night.

Remember, bring clothing to keep you warm. Layers are the way to go and one really warm coat with gloves, just in case. One minute our March days are lovely, but the next second a cloud cover could begin and it will drop between 10 and 20 degrees and it's snowing like a maniac. Ya never know!

I am looking forward to being your tour guide for the next nine months. I'll be talking about high altitude and hotels that cater to your doggies next, for those of us who can't bear to leave Asta behind! See you, D.A. Davenport

## Left Coast Crime 2008

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